

ACTS
The First Forty Days
Acts 1:2-8

When a new President of the United States takes office, the congress, the press and the people anxiously wait to see how the President will run the country. The first one hundred days are very significant. It is usually conceded by political experts that what a President does the first hundred days determines the general trend of his administration.

Jesus Christ had forty days between His resurrection and ascension. It was during these first forty days of His post-resurrection ministry that He was setting the trend for His spiritual administration on earth and in the church. There is no questions that Jesus Christ accomplished much in these forty days and the world has never been the same because of His post-resurrection ministry.

From the last message, we concluded that the Book of Acts is a record or history about the continued ministry of the ascended Christ at the right hand of the Father as He rules, leads, guides and empowers the church on earth by the mighty working of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Luke was what Jesus “began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1) and the Book of Acts is what Jesus Christ continues “to do and to teach“. It was suggested that the Book of Acts should be entitled, “The Acts of the Risen Christ Which He Did Through The Apostles In The Power Of The Holy Spirit“. Just a brief study of Acts will show it is all about Christ acting in the lives of men and women. In Acts 2:24, in the choice of an apostle replacement for Judas, the disciples prayed, “Thou Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which of these two Thou hast chosen“. In Acts 2:33, it is Christ who “poured forth” the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:47, it is stated that “the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved“. In Acts 3:16, we see a man being healed in the name of Christ and “giving faith which comes through Him“. Paul in Acts 9:5 said, “Who art Thou, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting“. In Acts 16:14, it clearly says that “the Lord opened her heart“, referring to Lydia. In Acts 18:9, “he Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘do not be afraid‘“. The Acts is all about what Jesus continues to do and teach, and if we miss this point we have missed the thrust of the whole Book of Acts.

Jesus Christ is alive and ministering in this world now. We Christians do not worship a dead Christ who passed off the scene two thousand years ago but a living Christ, whom we know and whose presence we feel. This Christ is real for every true Christian. He is just as real as our family or closest friend. In fact, He is more real because He is our God. If we are true Christians, Christ is at work in our lives everyday because He has risen from the dead, ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven and has sent His Holy Spirit into our hearts to make His presence known and felt.

THE RESURRECTED CHRIST TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES 1:2, 3

He Gave Commands (1:2): “Until the day He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.” -- When Jesus Christ was on this earth for thirty years and especially the last three years of His life, He chose and taught His twelve disciples, but they were not able to comprehend all that Christ had to say. After His resurrection and before His ascension (40 days), He took the opportunity to teach His disciples about things they could not understand before. Christ gave His disciples definite commandments and orders. His final commands to the disciples were to preach the gospel to the whole world and to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

“And that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations -- beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Lk. 24:47-49).

During these forty days, Christ went over and over with the disciples things He wanted them to know and gave them commandments by which to live.

There is much about the post-resurrection ministry which we know nothing at all. The Bible only gives a sketchy outline of what was taught by our Lord. We do know that Christ went to the Old Testament and taught the disciples about Himself.

“Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled’” (Lk. 24:44).

The reason the disciples began to grasp who Christ really was, was because Christ opened their spiritual understanding. “Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Lk. 24:45). Oh what teaching Christ must have given to His disciples! How glorious it must have been to sit and listen to Christ unfold the Old Testament scriptures about Himself! When Christ appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He secretly taught them about Himself from the Old Testament. “And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Lk. 24:27). When Christ opened their eyes to His identity, they exclaimed, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?” (Lk. 24:32). How do we get a burning heart for God? We must let Christ teach us from the Bible. It must have been an exciting time for these disciples to be given spiritual understanding so as to have their hearts burning for Christ.

Notice carefully Christ gave these orders to His disciples “by the power of the Holy Spirit.” If Christ, the perfect man needed the work of the Holy Spirit, how much more do you and I, sinners saved by grace need the work of the Holy Spirit? Infinitely more!

He Showed Convincing Proofs (1:3a): To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days,” -- Jesus Christ appeared at least ten different times after His resurrection to His disciples. Why did He do this? Obviously to teach His disciples more about Himself but mainly to show them He was alive. He is a living Savior, not a dead man. He is the living Christ, not a corpse. Jesus Christ is still living, working, acting and teaching individual Christians in the church through the Holy Spirit.

Christ's resurrection appearances give “convincing” or “infallible” proofs. The evidence is abundant for the actual resurrection of Christ from the dead and it would hold up in any law court today. In fact, First Corinthians Fifteen tells us Christ appeared to five hundred brethren at once. Could all of these witnesses be lying? The word “appeared” comes from the Greek word from which we get our English word “ophthalmic” which literally means “the eyeball.” The disciples “eyeballed” Christ for forty days. They saw Him again and again and scrutinized Him closely. These appearances of Christ were no hallucinations or psychological visions. The disciples saw Christ, touched Christ, talked to Christ and ate with Christ. The Risen Christ was the same Christ who had lived, died and was buried, except now He had a resurrected body.

There is abundant proof today for the resurrection of Christ.. The problem with the unbeliever today is not the facts but his own unbelief. No intelligent person doubts that the Battle of Waterloo actually happened and that is a historical event. Napoleon lived and fought and lost the Battle of Waterloo. How do we know this? We had eyewitnesses of the event and it was recorded in the pages of history. Yet, today there is far more evidence for the resurrection of Christ than for the Battle of Waterloo. What is man's problem? The natural, unbelieving heart loves darkness rather than light and runs from any facts that would demand a change in one's life style. The problem is not in the mind but in the will!

Christianity is the only religion in the world based on historical fact. The life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ are facts and they are all essential to Christianity. Christianity is not just something someone thought up nor is it an emotional religious experience. It is based on the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christianity is not just a feeling to make people happy. No, it is a historical fact

and can be proven to have a historical basis. No other religion can make that claim. The Christian Faith must be tested by the historical fact of the resurrection of Christ. Any person who dares to test the reality of the resurrection and acts upon this fact will find that the Holy Spirit will make real to his heart the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the bedrock upon which all Christianity rests. Anytime we are troubled with doubts or are under attack for our Christian Faith, we should come right back to this fundamental fact. It is thought Luke is saying to the enemies of Christianity, "Look, if you want to destroy the Christian Faith then prove, once and for all, that the resurrection is not real!" The evidence is so convincing for the historical fact of the resurrection of Christ that many have studied the facts objectively and have become Christians.

About one hundred years ago two men who were skeptics, who had lectured against the Bible, decided they would issue a volume about the impossibility of the claims of Christianity. One was Lord Littleton, a member of the House of Lords, well known in England. The other was Dr. Nathanael West, a well-known scholar and writer. They decided to do this but they also considered themselves honest men. They said, "Before we issue a treatise on the impossibility of the claims of Christ in the Bible, we will give the Bible a hearing. We will read the Bible, we will study the four Gospels," and they did. Each man by himself in his own study took the New Testament, and read the four Gospels and studied them. Both men were finally saved, both were led to Christ, and left a record and testimony that stirred all England.

He Taught Concerning The Kingdom (1:3b): "And speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." -- During the forty days of His post-resurrection ministry, Christ continued to teach His disciples about the kingdom of God. Every Jew in the Old Testament understood the kingdom to be a literal, earthly, Messianic kingdom and they looked for Messiah to set up this kingdom. However, with Christ rejected by the Jewish nation, Christ needed to instruct His disciples about a change in the kingdom program. The disciples in the church had to have a clear understanding about the difference between the earthly kingdom promised in the Old Testament and the spiritual kingdom established by Christ until the earthly kingdom is set up.

Christ came to the Jews and preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" but they rejected their Messiah. His own people said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." When Pilate said to the Jews, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." They put Christ to death, but death could not hold the King and He rose from the dead and sits at the Father's right hand as a glorious King. He reigns even though the earthly manifestation of the kingdom is now in abeyance. The world, as did the Jews, rejects Christ and His kingdom, but those who are true believers in Christ, touched by the spiritual new birth, honor Christ as King and He rules in their hearts spiritually as King. The future, earthly kingdom will come but in the King's absence from this earth, the true followers of Christ allow Christ to rule and reign in their hearts, for they have been brought out from the authority of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Whenever men and women turn from their sin and recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and King, they enter into a spiritual kingdom, waiting for the future, earthly manifestation of this kingdom.

The kingdom concept is vitally important to our Christian walk. We preach a spiritual kingdom where sinners are to acknowledge Christ as King.

"But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike" (Acts 8:12).

It is "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God".

"Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:22).

The Christian relationship to the kingdom of God is important. The Apostle Paul thought a right understanding of the kingdom important and we find him preaching on the subject in the last chapter of Acts.

“And when they had set a day for him they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening” (Acts 28:23).

“And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered” (Acts 28:30, 31).

Is Christ your King? Does He rule spiritually in your heart? Are you waiting for the coming of Christ and the establishment of His future kingdom in its earthly and heavenly forms? Remember, if Christ is not our King, we are not His children!

THE RESURRECTED CHRIST PROMISED THE BAPTIZING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT 1:4, 5

The Promise (1:4): “And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you heard of from Me;’” -- Jesus Christ gave His disciples specific instructions. They were to stay put in Jerusalem, and do nothing but wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit. “And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Lk.24:49). Christ had promised His disciples a very special work or endowment with the Holy Spirit. Christ had a task to do through His disciples and they could not do this task of reaching men for Christ apart from this special work of the Holy Spirit.

Christ will reach men for Himself by means of the Holy Spirit working through men as instruments. The disciples could not become effective witnesses without the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, they would “botch up” the whole process of witnessing. No Christian can be an effective witness if he is not operating in the power of the Holy Spirit. Every attempt to advance the cause of Christ apart from the source of the Holy Spirit simply destroys the message God wants to convey.

The Explanation (1:5): “For John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.” -- The kind of baptism Christ was talking about was not a ritual, water baptism as John the Baptist performed, but a mighty, spiritual baptism produced by the Holy Spirit. This is the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit, totally unknown in the Old Testament. Old Testament saints knew of the indwelling and filling of the Spirit, but nothing of the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. The disciples knew something of the work of the Holy Spirit in that He abode with them but it was not a permanent indwelling.

“That is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you” (Jn. 14:17).

The disciples were also given a special work of the Holy Spirit during the time from Christ’s resurrection to the Day of Pentecost. “And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn.20:22). These ministries of the Holy Spirit were not the particular, special work of the Holy Spirit in baptizing men into Jesus Christ to form the Body of Christ, the church. The disciples could not be effective in service for Christ until the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit took place on the Day of Pentecost.

God’s work must always be done in God’s power and God’s power is the Holy Spirit. It is not enough to know what God wants us to do or to merely engage in busy work for God, for God’s work can only be done in God’s way with God’s power if it is to be spiritually effective. It is not enough to know about the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit must empower the Christian to get the work done. To be effective a Christian must yield to the Holy Spirit in the task of living for Christ and reaching a lost world for Christ. No Christian will ever learn what it means to be subject to the Risen Christ who is not empowered, directed and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Vance Havner, lamenting the powerlessness of the twentieth century church with all of its huge programs said, “Never has the church had so much wire stretched and so little power in it.”

THE RESURRECTED CHRIST SET HIS DISCIPLES STRAIGHT ABOUT THE KINGDOM PROGRAM

The Question (1:6): “And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’” -- The disciples asked an honest question about when the literal, earthly kingdom would be given to Israel. They were still somewhat fuzzy in their thinking on this subject. The fact of an earthly kingdom is correct, but the mistake of the disciples was that they thought it would be set up “at this time“.

Some commentators who deny there will be any future earthly kingdom say the disciples were wrong ever to ask this question because they had not learned that the kingdom is only spiritual and not earthly. However, Christ's reply would cause us to think otherwise.

The Answer (1:7): “He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;’” -- Notice carefully the Lord Jesus did not rebuke them or think the question irrelevant. Christ did not say, “You disciples are all wrong. There is no earthly kingdom for Israel.” As a matter of fact, Christ affirmed there will be an earthly kingdom for Israel but it was somewhere in the future in God's sovereign plan. The Bible tells us the earthly kingdom will come when Christ returns in His second advent.

The issue before the Apostles was not the earthly kingdom for Israel, nor should it be an issue before the church today other than we know it will happen. Prophecy should never divide Christians because when Christ returns premils, postmils and amils will all agree. Let us remember, however, the coming of the Lord Jesus and the events surrounding His coming are “fixed by His own authority.”

The Promise (1:8): “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” -- These disciples were thinking in terms of timetables, schedules and programs but Christ told them about the power of the Holy Spirit which they would receive to get the work of reaching the world for Christ accomplished. It is Christ by the Holy Spirit through men who will reach the world with the gospel. It is a supernatural work that only the Holy Spirit can accomplish through men.

God will restore the kingdom to Israel in His own good time, but in the intervening time He has His own program for the disciples. His disciples are to witness for Christ in the power of the Spirit. The work of reaching men for Christ cannot be done in one's own strength, for “it is not by power or by might but by my Spirit, says the Lord.” Holy Spirit power accomplishes things for God. The power of the Spirit is irresistible. There is no way to oppose it or destroy it or stop it or overthrow it. Holy Spirit power will win men and women, boy and girls to Christ. Holy Spirit power is a glorious kind of power which changes a person from within and not from without. There is simply no way to program the work of the Holy Spirit and all any Christian can do is be submitted and committed to Jesus Christ and keep the command of Christ to be a witness, and the Holy Spirit will work when and how He pleases.

Christ said, “You shall be My witnesses.” The program God has for the church is a witnessing program. True witnesses belong to Christ and sustain such a relationship to Christ that they feel they must share the life of Christ with others. We are witnesses. The task of reaching the world for Christ is not going to be done in a day and this process will continue until Christ returns for His church. We are witnesses, not propagandists, trying to brainwash people. We are witnesses, not salesmen, trying to peddle a product. We are witnesses, not recruiters, trying to get everybody to join our particular religious club. We are witnesses. A witness is one who shares what he knows. A witness talks about Christ and not about himself. When a witness talks about himself it is always in terms of what Christ has done for him. A mark of a phony Christian or a false church is that they are talking about self or an organization and not about Jesus Christ, the Lord. True witnesses simply tell what they know about the resurrected Christ. They talk about His fantastic person, His glorious character, His exciting plan, His matchless work and His mighty power. If we really know Christ, we will talk about Him. Witnessing is not just doctrine or church; it is being in touch with the Living One and telling others about Him.

The program of God was to begin in Jerusalem (at home) and move to Judea (our country), Samaria (bordering

countries) and “the remotest part of the earth” (every nation under the sun). Christ's last words to the church were “be witnesses!” The first and primary task of every Christian and every local church is to witness at home and abroad. All worship and all programs must have as the ultimate end the glorification of God through the spreading of the good news of Christ.

R.A. Torrey once said,

If the individual believer wishes to have fellowship with Jesus Christ, he must go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. He may not be able to go in his own person but in that case he can go by his gifts and by his prayers. Any Christian who is not deeply interested in foreign missions is not in fellowship with Jesus Christ. Since a true church is a company of obedient believers, what is true of each believer will be true of the church, with the added power and blessing that issues from cooperation.

THE RESURRECTED CHRIST ASCENDED TO HEAVEN 1:9

“And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” -- Four times in Acts One it says Christ “was taken up” (Acts 1:2, 9, 11, 22), so the ascension of Christ seems to be the key thought in this first chapter. What an experience this must have been for the disciples. As they were standing on the Mount of Olives, they saw Him suddenly lift and ascend into a cloud. He disappeared and they would never see Him again in the flesh until He returns in His second advent (II Cor. 5:16). As He rose supernaturally from their presence, a cloud, probably the Shekinah glory of the Old Testament, obscured Him as to suggest to them that while He was gone He was still there. They were alone but they were not alone. Christ would still be present with them through the work of the Holy Spirit. Christ would now carry out His work on earth from heaven by means of the Holy Spirit working through men.

The ascension tells us a resurrected, glorified man is in heaven at the right hand of the Father. There's a man in glory, even Jesus Christ, the Lord. He is a representative man for true believers and because He is there Christians know they too shall be there one day themselves.

The disciples stood looking and gazing at Christ as He moved into heaven. They were awe struck and amazed with delight. Men on earth were “goggle-eyed” over the ascension but what was happening in heaven? What a homecoming it must have been as the God-Man took His place at the Father's right hand. Never was there a coronation like that one. What excitement must have taken place as millions and millions and millions of angels greeted the Lord Jesus Christ in His glorified body. This was the first time that resurrected, glorified humanity had been seen in heaven, even though Elijah and Enoch had been taken up bodily into heaven. The ascension was a glorious event in heaven. Apparently every angel in the universe was there for this event but two, for two of these angels had to stay behind to deliver a message to the disciples.

It should be pointed out that space travel is nothing really new for Bible-believing Christians. In His ascension, the Lord Jesus took off and did not need a launching pad, a space suit or a missile. He supernaturally ascended.

THE RESURRECTED CHRIST IS COMING BACK TO EARTH 1:10, 11

“And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.’”

The two men were probably angels but some have thought they might be Moses and Elijah because these two men are the great representatives of the Law and the Prophets. It seems best, however, to take them as angels.

Jesus Christ went into heaven in bodily form and will return again to this earth in bodily form. He went up personally, bodily and visibly and He will return the same way. He will even come back to the same location from which He left, the Mount of Olives.

“And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south” (Zech. 14:4).

Notice carefully the last words mentioned about Christ as He bodily had anything to do with this earth are, “This Jesus . . . will come”. Jesus Christ will return and conquer all His enemies at the second advent. He at that time will establish His kingdom on earth and the saints shall reign with Him.

When Christ returns, He will remove the curse on nature. Men today are looking for a solution to the ecological crisis which we face today. Man's environment is about to swallow up humanity. How shall we solve these problems? We won't! They are going to get much worse. The situation will get so bad that human life will hardly be able to exist on this planet. Christ said that the Tribulation of the future would be so terrible that no flesh would be saved if it were not for the intervention of God. Christ will intervene into history at His second advent, and then He will solve the ecology problem by removing the curse from the earth so that all nature will bloom and blossom again.

CONCLUSION

In His ascension, Christ went to heaven to send back the Holy Spirit to carry on His work of saving men on earth. Now, today, is the day of salvation and Jesus Christ saves all who come to Him by faith and accept Him as Lord, Savior and King. When He returns in His second advent, He will not come as Savior but as Judge. He shall judge and cast into hell all those who have not obeyed Him by placing their faith in Christ. If you are not a Christian, do not delay your decision for Christ. Your eternal destiny is at stake!